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CREATE

COMMUNITY RESEARCH INTO EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ENTERPRISES



● **RURAL ENTERPRISE VICTORIA**

● **(RE)WORKING (RE)INTEGRATION**

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(RE)WORKING (RE)INTEGRATION

In March 1981, the labour force participation rate for persons with disabilities was 30.5% as compared to 70.1% for all persons. In the following article, **David Griffiths** argues that one of the goals of integration should be that this massive discrepancy be rectified. Labour force participation rates for people with disabilities should be at the same level as for all people in the labour force.

He also argues that for a disability employment policy to work it must be comprehensive and be based on structural barriers which prevent the achievement of this goal.

Employment (re)integration is fundamental to the goal of community (re)integration of people with disabilities — equalising life opportunities and outcomes.

At December 1987, the labour market participation rate for all persons in Victoria was 63.7% — 76.8% for males and 51.0% for females. While disaggregated figures are not available for 1987, participation rates are available for 1981.

For persons with disabilities aged 15-64 years the labour force participation rate was 30.5% at March 1981 — compared with 70.1% for all persons.

Given, therefore, that the majority of people are in employment, a community (re)integration goal should be that a majority of people with disabilities should be in employment — with labour force and employment participation rates equal to all persons in the labour force. Furthermore, employment is defined as a person who worked in a job, business or on a farm (including employees, employers and self-employed persons). To argue otherwise is to segregate people with disabilities.

In addition, employment provides people with a personal sense of worth through the provision of goods and services and an independent source of income. This is particularly important because, despite the provision of social security payments, there is increasing political and economic emphasis on independent and dependent income earners.

With the explicit articulation of the New Right and media coverage of welfare dependency, independent income earners are promoted as having a high value of not being dependent on the State. This dependency theme is further promoted in documents which focus on access and equity — *Getting to Work: Report of the Inquiry into Entry or Return to the Workforce by Social Security*

Pensioners (1988). Without employment opportunities and outcomes, therefore, people with disabilities will continue to be dependent on the State for income support and subject to the ongoing critique of the New Right and exposure in the media as burdens to taxpayers.

POLICY AND PRACTICE

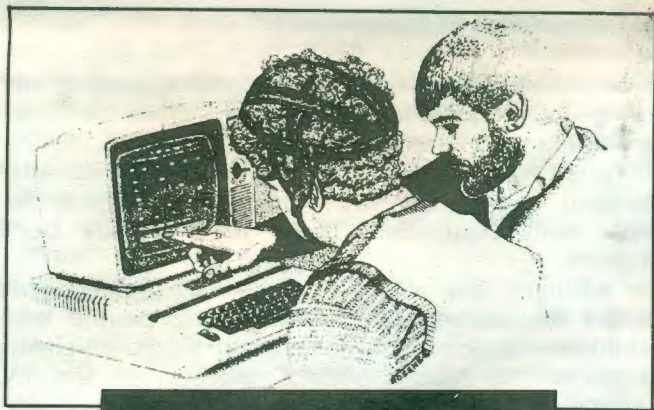
Having identified the relationship between employment and community (re)integration, it is now necessary to briefly consider the possible components of a disability employment policy and practice.

Before doing so, however, it is perhaps necessary to briefly address the issue of complexity — allowing the complexities of past and current discrimination, exploitation and illegality to confuse and obscure the issue of disability employment. There is no justification for consensus-based publicly sanctioned poverty for individuals and groups who have disabilities.

In recent years, there has been increased emphasis by government, voluntary agencies and employment entrepreneurs on developing employment placement and retention projects for the long-term unemployed and disadvantaged — including people who have disabilities. Innovative approaches and projects have been pioneered — Jobsupport and the Challenge Foundation (NSW), Westworks, the Open Employment Training Program, the Inner Urban Co-operative and the Disability Employment Action Centre (Vic) and Project Employment (WA).

While placement and retention projects are critical to the employment (re)integration of people with disabilities, an exclusive emphasis on these projects will not constitute an adequate response. From the evidence, it is clear that overall there are too many workers competing for too few vacancies. According to Victoria's Department of Labour, at November 1987, there were 11,300 job vacancies in Victoria and at December 1987, there were 133,600 unemployed seeking full-time (101,800) and part-time (31,900) work. Placement and retention projects, however, do improve the initial and ongoing competitiveness of their participants — influencing who obtains and retains employment. Employers who report difficulties in recruiting workers is evidence of job turnover patterns and not the availability of vacancies for everyone who wants to work.

These projects are appropriate in recognising the specific placement and retention needs of population-specific groups. A questionable by-product of the disability projects in particular is the attempt to sell workers with disabilities as more reliable than workers without disabilities. It is questionable for three reasons — it is a provocative criticism of workers who do not have disabilities inviting a reaction, it creates and maintains a super worker myth and it depends on reported research outcomes which could change and, therefore, serve to undermine the competitiveness claim.



What placement and retention cannot address, inevitably and necessarily, are the structural barriers to vocational education and training and employment. They can manipulate rather than transform these barriers. They can assist individuals and groups become more competitive in obtaining and retaining jobs. This is why projects such as the Disability Employment Action Centre are particularly important — going beyond placement and retention to address structural barriers.

COMPREHENSIVE

A disability employment policy must be comprehensive rather than selective. Basic to comprehensiveness is the issue of full employment — whether there is a collective duty to provide work for everyone who wants to work.

In addressing the question of employment (re)integration, therefore, it is relevant to consider whether the focus is on employment opportunities or outcomes. An employment opportunity focus is on enabling individuals and groups to compete for obtaining and retaining employment. An employment outcomes focus is on enabling individuals and groups to actually obtain and retain employment.

The development of appropriate disability employment initiatives has to be based on an analysis of the structural barriers which prevent the placement and retention of people with disabilities. These barriers could be summarised as follows:

1. The number of jobs
2. The structure of jobs
3. The cost of jobs
4. Entry requirements of vocational education and training and employment
5. The non-worker myth

The number of jobs

There is a shortage of jobs in open employment and, therefore, there is considerable scope for local employment initiatives. Local employment initiatives commonly refer to co-operative, municipal and community enterprises. Sheltered workshops have the potential to become a new form of local employment initiative.

There has been considerable criticism of sheltered workshops in recent years — an intensification of a criticism that has always existed. In brief, the criticism is based on sheltering — sheltering the owners and

controllers of sheltered workshops from the requirements of the industrial relation system. The industrial relations consequences for workers who have disabilities in sheltered workshops has been simple and legal — token rather than award wages and conditions.

It is, of course, simplistic to simply blame the owners and controllers of sheltered workshops. After all, governments are responsible for legislative requirements and the funding of the workshops and trade unions have a responsibility to organise unorganised workers such as workers with disabilities in sheltered workshops.

The solution is at once simple and complex. Accept the reality that sheltered workshops should be placed under the industrial relations system and be subject, therefore, to industrially arbitrated award wages and conditions.

I doubt that we can seriously indulge in two myths. The first myth is that all sheltered workshops will disappear and therefore, the issue will disappear. The second myth is that a supported employment project is not a sheltered workshop.

Given the continued reality of sheltered workshops, consideration should be given to restructuring and redirecting sheltered workshops — an issue familiar to the management of sheltered workshops.

The Victorian Government is committed to the objective of ensuring that all individuals are given full opportunity to establish prosperous small business access associated Government services, regardless of their backgrounds.

To achieve this goal, the Government is developing a range of initiatives designed to assist and encourage new entrepreneurs establish or operate small firms. Women, people from non-English speaking backgrounds, Aboriginals and the long-term unemployed are amongst the initial target groups. A Women's Small Business Specialist has been appointed at the Small Business Development Corporation. A business counsellor specialist in Aboriginal small business will also be appointed to the Small Business Development Corporation (SBDC).

All sheltered workshops are small business enterprises. They have the difficulty of achieving commercial viability and meeting the developmental needs of their abled and disabled workforces. The appointment of a Sheltered Workshop Business Advisor would assist sheltered workshops obtain and retain commercial viability — consistent with a commitment to training and employing workers who have disabilities.

The development of co-operatives offers a specific opportunity to provide employment opportunities and outcomes for people who have disabilities and to democratically restructure sheltered workshops. Co-operatives provide an alternative philosophical basis and structure for people with disabilities. This alternative potential has been identified in the report of Victoria's Ministerial Advisory Committee on Co-operation, *The Co-operative Way: Victoria's Third Sector* (1986).

There is growing experience of this potential of co-operatives. Victoria has the Inner Urban Co-operative and in recent years a number of co-operatives have been established in the UK which have targetted on employing people who have disabilities — Welfare Maintenance and Supply, Jarvis Street Methodist Church Community Workshop and the Daily Bread Co-operative.

The Structure of Jobs

The structure of jobs are a key determinant of who is recruited into those jobs.

Jobs in workplaces have certain tasks to produce desired outcomes. It is always necessary to review the tasks as a basis for achieving the same outcomes as efficiently and effectively as possible.

With workers who have disabilities, there is a need to match the abilities of the worker with the job tasks to achieve equivalent outcomes. This may involve changed or different tasks. There are two basic ways of redesigning jobs — modifying the job description or duties and/or modifying jobs.

The Cost of Jobs

Employers are concerned to recruit the most productive workers and the higher the cost of recruitment (eg. the need for technical equipment), the less likely a worker will be recruited. There is also a cost for workers with disabilities moving into open employment — the security of pensions and fringe benefits.

Various Commonwealth and State fringe benefits are available to various social security pensioners and beneficiaries — including a range of free pharmaceuticals. In *Getting to Work* (May 1988) the House of Representatives Standing Committee on employment, Education and Training recommended that fringe benefits should continue to be available for a limited period to enable social security recipients to (re)enter employment.

All workplaces require technical equipment to assist workers to undertake their tasks. Basic equipment for all offices, for instance, includes telephones, photocopiers and word processors. There is a direct relationship between the productivity of a workplace and its technical equipment.

For workers with disabilities additional technical equipment may be needed to assist these workers to undertake their work tasks — to complement their own productivity. Not all workers who have disabilities require technical equipment and the equipment required may be inexpensive. But, the cost of technical equipment should not determine which individuals with which disabilities will be employed.

Technical equipment may be expensive, however, and it is necessary to establish Technical Equipment Funds for this purpose. Without these funds, certain groups of workers with disabilities will be excluded from obtaining and retaining employment. Some workers with disabilities will only be able to obtain and retain employment if they can fund their own technical equipment.

The Commonwealth Government provides technical equipment through the CES. There is a \$2000 limit on funds available. The Victorian Accident Rehabilitation Council also has a technical equipment fund but the limit is \$4000. The Traffic Accident Commission has a fund with no specified limits. The NSW Public Service Board has a technical equipment fund with an annual budget of approximately \$50,000 but no specified individual limits. The Victorian Public Service Board does not have a technical equipment fund.

Entry Requirements

The conditions for entry into vocational education and training and employment provide a further basis for determining who is recruited and retained.

In recent years, there have been a number of successful supported and competitive employment projects for people with disabilities. These have already been identified.

In addition, the Victorian Government's Job Link Program has successfully been placing people with disabilities — approximately 30% of the Program's clients and placements have a physical, intellectual, sensory, psychiatric or other form of disability.

The continuation of such projects is critical for it develops an employment expertise, and therefore, facilitates the placement and retention of persons who have disabilities. These projects are critical in providing intensive specialist advocacy services.

The development of appropriate disability employment initiatives has to be based on an analysis of the structural barriers which prevent the placement and retention of people with disabilities.

What these projects have in common, however, is placement and retention within the private sector. There is an equal need to address placement and retention within the public sector. After all, at December 1986, State Government Departments and authorities employed 305,500 people — approximately 15% of the Victorian Labour Force.

Placement services are dependent on targetting — targets for the recruitment and retention of population — specific groups. Training systems and labour market programs do not operate in conceptual, philosophical and practical voids. They all exhibit structures and processes which could include or exclude the long-term unemployed and disadvantaged.

This issue is central to the Victorian Government's Youth Guarantee and its Social Justice Strategy. The placement and retention of people with disabilities in vocational education and training and employment depends on resourced targetting. Guidelines for the employment of people with disabilities are a necessary basis for this resourcing.

Targetting is itself the outcome of an access and equity policy. The basis of disability employment access and equity is a policy which provides a conceptual and practical framework. It is critical, therefore, that agencies such as Victoria's Public Service Board, the Department of Labour and the State Training Board develop specific access and equity policies.

Without policies it is difficult to judge whether or not outcomes are adequate. Clear policies provide the basis for comparing intentions and outcomes. In 1987 the Victorian Government established the State Training Board. The STB is responsible for policy, program development and management of all training systems in Victoria — including TAFE courses, apprenticeships and traineeships.

To ensure access and equity opportunities and outcomes for people who have disabilities, it is necessary for there to be an access and equity policy and a mechanism for achieving this policy.

A Disability Training Unit could be established within the STB. This Unit would have the responsibility of advocating access and equity processes and outcomes for people who have disabilities. The Training Unit would also have a particular responsibility to work with sheltered workshops, day training centres and supported and competitive employment projects. The establishment of the Unit would be within the context of a new training culture.

The Non-Worker Myth

There is a notion that many people with disabilities are not workers — that they are incapable of real work. This has informed the development of sheltered workshops, the system of slow worker permits and activities of training centres.

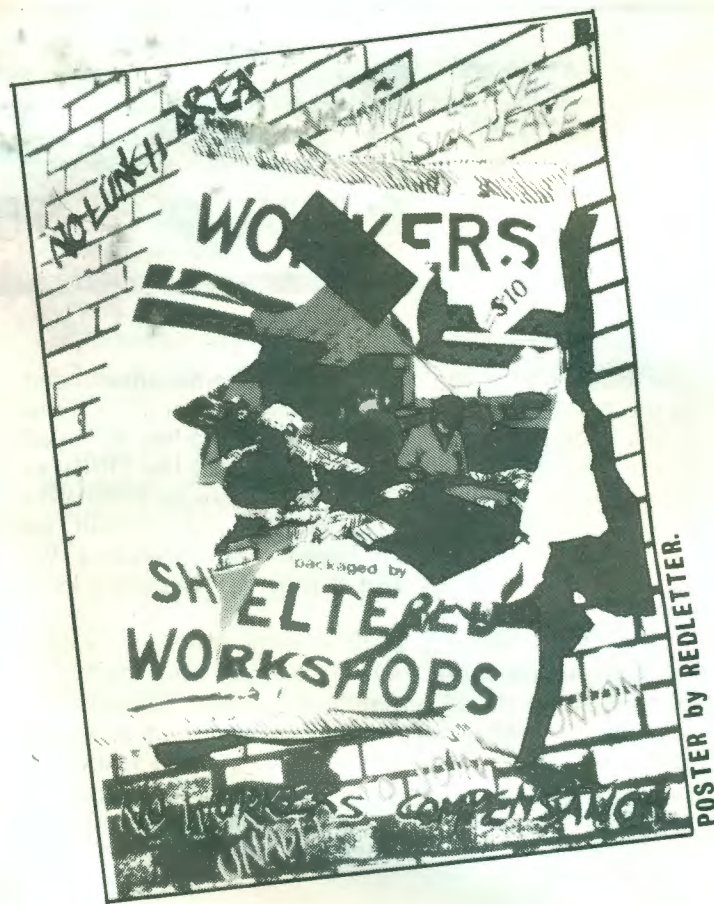
Slow worker permits are used in competitive employment situations to legalise under-award wages for workers who have disabilities — on the basis that their productivity levels do not justify the award wage.

The Jobsupport project in NSW has creatively used slow worker permits to get people with disabilities into the workforce, and then, work with workers and employers to move onto an award wage.

While there are few slow worker permits in existence, it is possible that with an increased emphasis on competitive employment there will be an attempt to extend their usage.

Trade unions have been concerned that some employers have used slow worker permits to exploit workers and that the slow worker system of application, assessment, decision and review is ad hoc and open to abuse. For some years, trade unions have argued for a proper review of slow worker permits.

While the future of Victoria's 11 training centres is subject to debate and decision, there remain up to 3000 residents in these Centres. The majority of these residents have been excluded from any significant vocational activity. The minority of 217 who are involved include people engaged in activities which require award wages and conditions. These are not paid because the workers are perceived as residents rather than employees and because they are not represented by a trade union.



CONCLUSION

In discussing the structural barriers to the vocational education and training and employment placement and retention of people with disabilities, a number of initiatives have been identified. Models for a coherent and integrated disability employment strategy have already been established — the Commonwealth Government's Aboriginal Employment Development Policy and the Victorian Government's Women's Statement on Employment and the Youth Guarantee.

Trade unions have a critical role in protecting and developing the rights of workers who have disabilities. Workers in sheltered workshops are not represented by unions. Trade unions have little experience of representing workers with intellectual disabilities in particular. Recent support employment alternatives to sheltered workshops have been developed in Australia in non-award areas which are equally not represented by unions. The ACTU has already developed a Disabled Workers Charter. That this charter has not been developed since its original adoption in 1981 is reflective of an unchanging situation — both in terms of the employment conditions of people with disabilities and the response of trade unions.

Despite significant levels of unemployment, the majority of people in the community and the labour force are employed. (Re)integration could not be said to be working, then, if it is (re)integrating people with disabilities into a community without work. Community (re)integration, then, needs to be (re)worked — it if is to work.